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MUSA VERTICORDIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE REVELATION OF ST. LOVE THE DIVINE: A POEM.

THE ALHAMBRA AND OTHER POEMS.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

THE POET'S CHARTER; OR, THE BOOK OF JOB.

MUSA VERTICORDIA

BY

FRANCIS COUTTS

"In old *Rome* there was a Temple erected . . . to *Venus Verticordia, quæ maritos uxoribus reddebat benevolos.*"
The Anatomy of Melancholy.
3. 3. 4. 2.

JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
LONDON & NEW YORK. MDCCCCV

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MUSA VERTICORDIA

Hail, bright morning beam!
Now my task retaking,
I indite the dream
God for me is making.

We may draw our theme,
Management, and measure
Out of Earth; the dream
Comes of God's good pleasure.

MUSA VERTICORDIA

To thee, whom I have followed all my days,
I dedicate these lays;
Stern goddess, of the strong, relentless heart
To hold me to my part
Nor ever let me swerve from this my road,
Which now I print with blood,
To thee I bring the votive scroll, with tears
For all my ruined years.

Why didst thou charm me with thy trancing eyes,
Dark pools of deepest lies,
Where floated images of far delight,
Else hid from mortal sight,

Of happy hills and meadows fair to tread,
Now countries of the dead,
And shining seas that beckoned to my bark,
Yon stranded, shattered ark?

Vowed vestal, who hast made me pine and sigh
For thy virginity,
Demanding my devotion, since, a boy,
I left for thee my joy,—
Disdainful, thy dread beauty to be near,
Of all that men hold dear
(Though not to me was wanting worldly power
To snatch the prosperous hour):

Thou cruel mistress of the mental woe
That fades the summer glow,
Where once the lilies and the heart's-ease grew
Planting the bitter rue,

Making the garden of the soul a plot
Where none may pull a knot
Of gracious flowers; since rosemary now grows
Where once there flashed the rose:

Would that I might renounce thee and return
From thy regards, that burn
My heart with this imperishable flame,
The jest of foes, the blame
Of friends and lovers,—unremitting Thought,—
Distempered and distraught
By that mad anger at the World's mad ways
Which ends in mad amaze;

Or would I dared to listen to the throng
And their concenting song,
That teaches all endeavour is in vain,
All energy insane,

Except the acrobatic, to beguile
Gold-worshippers to smile;
For still the discontent within their souls
This iterate burden tolls:

"Why should we ponder on unhappy things,
Anticipate the stings
Of Fate and Death, and forge a thousand links
To falsify the Sphinx,
Who, with supreme indifference or disdain,
Still snaps the flimsy chain,
Destroying Reason, full of fleck and flaw,
By Life's unreasoning Law?"

Ah, sometimes still unwittingly I sigh
To sing the facile lie,
The old familiar fancies,—women, wine,
Pale moonlight and moonshine,

Faint ecstasies of pure religious faith,
The legend and the wraith,
With birds and butterflies, and dreams of gold,
The new dream and the old,—

A Watteau Shepherdess, with pastoral crook,
A level-flowing brook,
A Phrygian Shepherd, to whose piping bound
Angora sheep around,
Like tambour-pictures, worked in various wools,
For sofas and for stools,—
This is the Art, remote from sacred fires,
The common crowd admires.

For this is Nature seen by foolish eyes,
And this the Art of lies,—
The copied copy,—aye, a thousand-fold,—
The loved illusion old;

And hence the buzzing melodies abound
That kill the spheral sound,
And hence the copious verses issue, vain,
Inept, inert, inane.

Hence poetry is held in poor regard:
The mountebank and bard
Has each an equal duty on him laid,
Since both for tricks are paid,
To titillate, distract, amuse, and please,
The modern mind to ease
Of that which most the modern mind annoys,
The craving for new toys!

If it be said that simple folk delight
In simple sound and sight,
Then let them hasten to the fields and flowers,
And spend their simple hours

In murmuring woods, beside a murmuring stream,
Or where long grasses gleam
With light that chases shadow,—shadow, light,—
Like water ruffled white:

Or let them wander down a country lane,
Still wet with early rain,
And seek for Spring's nativity,—her sign,
A star of celandine,
That first (except the snowdrop, rarely found)
Adventures from the ground,
Ere yet is kindled by faint suns of March
The purple-tufted larch:

And so through all the pageant of the year,
From seed-time to full ear,
From celandine to saffron, let them stray
Their unpretentious way,

Till fall the leaves; and then, as sinks the sleep
On field and forest, keep
Brave vigil, till the sun unlock the floods
Of life and break the buds.

But let them never ask the lily white
The fount of her delight,
Nor why the golden pollen on her breast,
With open pride confessed,
Has made her no more envious of the rose,
Nor whether pansies close
Their petals to Love's colour-changing dart
Or press it to their heart.

And when 'neath acorned oaks, the moss they tread,
Or else a passage thread
Through fronds of bracken, when the mast is down,
Beneath the beeches brown,

Let them not marvel at yon shriek of pain
In Nature's own domain,
Nor what import those piteous feathers gay
That strew the woody way.

For they who hate to wonder and to weep,
Their eyes must ever keep
From stern Imagination's potent spell,
Whereby their gaze may dwell
No more on surfaces; for else they see,
Not that which seems to be,
But that which is: intolerable light,
As blinding as the night.

For thus have I been tortured, Syren dread,
And numbered with thy dead;
Casting my soul before thy awful throne,
Ere yet my doom was known,—

To be confined in Freedom, pent in Space,
For ever face to face
With Love and Truth and Beauty, all unfeigned,
And therefore unattained.

Ah, whither fled that confidence that first
In vernal hours I nursed,
Oft wandering by the Thames' pale eddying tide,
Where fast his waters glide
By cloistered Eton's elm-trees; fain to trace
Faint glimpses of thy grace,
Not fearing, in the trust of untaught years,
Thy power to teach me tears?

With what a solemn joy was I elate,
Dreaming to be thy mate!
The seaward-winding water I outsped,
Outsoared the lark o'erhead,

And shouted when in bordering snow was seen
The harvest's film of green:
Ah, mightst thou not have spared, from field or tide,
One hour to be my bride?

But thou wert proud, and proud to keep aloof,
Save for the sharp reproof
That stung my ears, and thereby stung my will
To importune thee still!
I sought to find in thee love, life, and rest,
Above what I possessed,
And give them to the World: but no! Thy thrall
Must suffer loss of all.

Must suffer loss of all: then be it so;
Some day the World will know
The martyrdom of thy enamoured swains,
Their patience and the pains

That they endure for men. But that will be,
When Thought at last is free,
To prove itself a passion more intense
Than all the lust of sense.

SINGERS OF THE CENTURY

ENLARGE your measure, minstrels; War and Trade,
These will endure as long as Lust endures;
For like voracious dragons in a drop
Of stagnant water, men devour their kind;
But not by these true Manhood can be made,
The urgent need that coveting obscures;
Finger, O minstrels, this forgotten stop,—
How in the mindless to create a mind:

How to be rid of hatred of stern thought,—
The discipline of ordered intellect,
Wherein alone the love of Mankind dwells
(And not in pity's fluctuating mood)

With truth diviner and less vainly sought
Than ancient Church can boast, or modern Sect,
Crazed with conceit of their own heavens and hells,
Or fondly-designated ill and good:

To make each reasonable spirit free
To work out its salvation, undeterred
By old accumulated custom's dross
Or by authority's self-loving law;
Depriving pompous preachers of their fee
Of ignorant applause, with which the herd
Reward the leaders that most deftly toss
The sugared falsehood to the public maw.

Our insignificant earth can keep her place
Among the monstrous strewing of the stars,
Which by the rule of number must obey
The chanting mathematics of the sky;

Why then should Man the little heap disgrace,
Maiming humanity with wounds and scars,
Save that he cannot find his ordered way
Nor fix Time's orbit in Eternity?

'Tis yours, O minstrels, to be seer and sage;
If bards have not imagination, who
Can hope to win it? That divinest power,
Piercing to sacramental verity
Beneath the superficial appanage,
Out of the old things bringing forth the new,
Divining from the seed the future flower,
And from the seen setting the unseen free.

Up, up! Bestir! Away with pretty speech
And tinkling melodies, to tickle ears
Made stupid with the drone of politics
Or commerce, or with clattering social din

Of silly tongues, like parrots each to each
Repeating and out-talking his compeers;
And cease your mild monotonies to mix
For jaded tastes; the true artistic sin.

Honour your office or relinquish verse;
Better to dig potatoes than despise
Your mission to bring messages to Man
Of voices that his ears can else not hear,
That cry aloud with blessing or with curse
Along the lonely borderland that lies
Where Science, Art, Religion overspan,
And only poets venture without fear.

Haste and bring thence great garlands for our streets,
Immense festoons of flowering Thought, to bind
About our houses and our alleys dark;
Not only posies for a complement

To rich men's porcelain, or a bunch of sweets
For a girl's hair; but meadowsful, to wind
Round life itself; till life itself must mark
And be transmuted by the hue and scent.

BAYREUTH: AN ANTITHESIS

I.

Parsifal

1.

Deep in the forest's moist malarious gloom,
  Dungeoned in terror of the world, they lie,
Knights of the Grail; as in a sick man's room,
  The air is faint with languid agony.

There is no man in all their spectral host,
  There is no woman in old Klingsor's crew;
Sir Parsifal is tempted by a ghost,
  Half ghost himself; since Love he never knew.

This is the Vale of Lust; the foul surmise
Of vowed virginity, imagining
That in the hell of Klingsor's garden lies
The heaven of Love. But yet the birds that sing

High in the foliage,—though I cannot hear
Their voice, for chimes and chantings—like the flowers,
Fulfil each other's beauty, without fear
Of retribution for their nuptial hours.

2.

Had you no message, Master, but this tale,
The little lamp that lit the Middle Age,—
The lie that lovers cannot win the Grail,
And Love can prove no godly parentage?

Could tawdry gardens such as Klingsor's draw
Into their clumsy toils a man made wise
By one o'er-mastering passion? 'Tis the law
Of Love alone that leads to Paradise.

Of Love; not pleasure; but that poignant bliss,
The joy of union, so akin to pain;
The sense of mutual mingling; not the kiss
Of folly, vapid, volatile, and vain.

On such false kisses trembling mystics pore;
Their mind is ravished of its maidenhead;
Possessed by Kundry, ever more and more
Damned by the dream of their desire and dread.

3.

I'll read the riddle, if you will;
Not as the Churches wish it read,

Not as they count the good and ill,
  Or separate the quick and dead;

But by the oneness of the whole
  Creation:—Love may be the Spear,
But if it pierce a morbid soul,
  Pushed into folly by the fear

Of Love itself, the wound is Lust;
  The worst corruption of the best;
Then venom gathers to the thrust
  Whose wholesome wounding once was blest.

Yet may the hurt of Lust be healed,
  If Love can once again be won;
The fount of pain by passion sealed,
  The flame extinguished by the sun.

II.

Die Meistersinger

I.

Released from that miasmic spell
And commune with sad souls, half dead,
With him who cobbled and sang as well
High on the hills of life we tread.

Well met, Hans Sachs! We grasp your hand,
We look you full in the face and feel
That men who in the sunshine stand
Need never in the darkness kneel.

Set in the brilliance and the breeze,
Their minds are emptied of the rust

Of mildew, lichens of disease,
And all the dragons of the dust.

Wisely to work and wisely sing,
To love as one who deems it wrong
No more than any woodland thing
Mated in May, makes life a song.

2.

What vigorous, virile strains are these!
What Maenad and yet measured mirth!
So sound the billows and the breeze
That bring salt savour to the Earth.

Now troop away those phantoms pale,
Pretenders of monastic days,
For Nürnberg drowns their cloistered wail
With the large din of human ways.

Now is Beckmesser's serenade
  By Hans Sachs' hammer sorely smit,
For here they follow love and trade
  And worship God with work and wit.

Harmonious life! Imagined sin
  Mars not its large concerted tone,
But every heart may hope to win
  A mode and music of its own.

3.

The Guilds of Nürnberg march along,
  The banners wave, the trumpets blow,
The women are fair, the men are strong,
  To love and labour well they know.

And now arrive the reverend sirs
  Who must adjudge the minstrel crown

To him who trolls the noblest verse,
To win the Beauty of the Town.

Beckmesser strums on silly strings
The jangling ballad's iterate note;
Derided soon: but Walter sings
The love that none can learn by rote.

Thus, Master of the wizard brain,
Of Love and Life you wove the spell;
Only the greatest sing that strain;
The least can sing of Heaven and Hell!

GLASTONBURY

I saw thee in a dream of years,
I see thee in a mist of tears,
Avilion, Island of the Blest;
Ah, would that here I had my rest!

Thy apple-blossoms, balmy bright,
Were comfort to a sickly sight,
Too often hurt by inward woe
And searching things that none may know;
To linger on thy haunted knoll
And hear the sacred legends toll,
Toll with a faint and phantom chime
Across the misty meads of Time,

Would calm the spirit's tossing sea,
Lulled as the Lake of Galilee,
When to the surface of the deep
Was called the underlying sleep.

None other way the weary soul
Shall leave the sound and sight of dole,
Than here in fancy to refashion
Far ages of a purer passion
Than any that now moves the heart
In camp or council, church or mart:
To pour again the mystic mere
Round Arthur's grave; again to hear
The monks their solemn psalms intone
In dim arcades of carven stone;
To vow again, ere faith shall fail,
Achievement of the Holy Grail.

Such was my vision of the years,
Now shadowed by a mist of tears,
Avilion, Island of the Blest;
Ah, would that here I had my rest!

MORWENSTOW*

NATURE bestows on every place
A gloom, a glory, or a grace;
But yet strange power belongs to Man
The hill and vale to bless or ban.

Here, by this black, forbidding coast,
Dwelt one who heard the heavenly host
Singing in every wind that blows,
In wave that breaks or stream that flows,

* Written on the occasion of the unveiling of a window in Morwenstow Church, in memory of the Rev. R. S. Hawker, on September 8, 1904. For references to his Poems, see the volume published by Mr. John Lane in this year.

And surely deemed that love divine,
Whose tendrils all his church entwine,
Is not too distant to be won
By Nature's humblest orison.

Wherefore amid these moors and steeps
His spirit ever laughs and weeps,
Weeps with the storm or laughs with glee
For rhythmic laughter of the sea;

No longer mute, the Token Stream
Repeats the pathos of his dream;
His dirge for days remembered not
Is echoed from Morwenna's grot;

And pilgrims, when they pause to con
The sacred well-house of Saint John,

Whose fountain feeds the lustral bowl
Wherein is laved each infant soul,

Or linger by St. Nectan's Kieve,
Watching the foamy waters leave
Their mossy cave, to seek for rest
In Severn Sea's unslumbering breast,

Or stray where rushy Tamar spills
Her new-born flood in slender rills,
Unguessing in her modest source
The goodly channel of her course,

Shall hear the river murmuring low
The melodies of Morwenstow,
While distant surges chime and toll
Antiphony from sound or shoal,

Shall hear the whisper of the well,
The clamour of the torrent, tell
Of him who had strange power to teach
Their wordless voices human speech.

SOLITUDE

Has it been your part long years to toil
In passionate intellectual pain,
Amid the false world's fret and foil,
Insinuating "All is vain"?

To hear the human Mind, besot
With blood of Saints, in slumber groan,
And know that you can rouse it not?
Ah then, you are alone, alone!

The Last Man will be lone as this,
When down the sky the last day sinks;
Because with warm, red lips you kiss
The cold, white lips of the Sphinx.

THE RETREAT

TO I. ALBENIZ

I LIVE no more in the outer world; for me
The rose is faded and the wine-cup dry:
Not that I fall to vainer apathy,
Nor sated with false pleasures vainly sigh;

But having proved the world in all its ways,
With sense, with dignity, nor fond nor mad,
I find not there a single thing to praise,
No, nor a single thing to make me glad.

A staggering drunken animal I see,
Careering o'er bare mountains and bare plains,
Intent upon its own absurdity,
And loving pleasure only for its pains;

That is the World; ah, friend, let us retire
Into the spacious chamber of our mind,
To sit and talk before the cosy fire
And listen to the winter, wailing wind!

TO LIBERTY

(*During the Imprisonment of Dreyfus*)

Didst thou escape from Alva's horrid sway,
Foil the Armada, bloody Mary's fires
Defy, survive the myriad funeral pyres
Lit for thy obsequies, as on the Day
Of Saint Bartholomew: did Luther lay
His Bible on the altar, which our sires
Made charter of the Church, that still aspires
To follow the Reformers' honest way:

Was this achieved and thus thy Master's hand
Made manifest, that thou at last shouldst come

To degradation in thy native land,—
In France, accounted once thy special home,—
Where now they seize thee, bind thee, scourge and brand,
And fling in fetters at the feet of Rome?

OSSERVATORE ROMANO

(*During the same time*)

Oblivious of infinity,—interred,
As in a chrysalis of scanty scope,
In this small world, where he must grovel and grope,—
Is Man more tragical or more absurd?
Consider that abominable word
Just uttered by the Journal of the Pope:
"A Jew accused of treason must not hope
"For sympathy from us." Have they not heard

That story of the Jew of Galilee,
Who suffered crucifixion for the blame

Of treason and the sin of heresy?

And lit they not the faggot's frequent flame,

To prove their perfect Catholicity

By burning those outside it, in his name?

PHILIP BAILEY

He, in dark seasons of ignoble aims,
Disguised by noble titles, built a book
To God's great glory; while the whole world shook
With villainous ambition, called by names
Euphonious, and the poets plied for fame's
Ephemeral approval, he forsook
The World for Space, and lit in Space a nook,
With cressets kindled at the heavenly flames.

Send us another Bailey to devote
His life to one high task! Men crawl the ground

For grains of gold; oh, send us one to dote
On Nature and on God! To scorn "profound
Knowledge of surfaces";* to dwell remote,
Content with his own labour to be crowned.

* The quality attributed in *Festus* to Lucifer.

THE SHIELD OF ENAMELS

Exhibited by Prof. Herkomer, R.A., in the Royal Academy, 1899

A Vision of Life: the Law Divine
Broods overhead, imposing still
The tangled, mutable twist and twine
Of ill in good and good in ill,
Of woe from joy and joy from woe,
On the ebbing and flowing world below.

There stands the triumphing Hour, amid
The splendours of the universe;
Yet, in her very triumph hid,
Stirs the inevitable curse,

The Law that nothing may remain
And all except the Law is vain.

Triumph of Love: yet Love contains,
  E'en in the moment of his bliss,
His own exterminating pains,
  The skull that grins beneath the kiss;
For souls that each to other fly
In pangs of coalescence die.

Triumph of Hate: but yet the deed
  Of vengeance or fanatic rage
Is pregnant with the wide-blown seed
  Of an ameliorating age;
Death crowns him, when a good man dies,
  And Death his deeds will canonise.

Murder and motherhood—the strange,
Sad meetings of the high and low—
Hope and despair—in changeless change
Of woe from joy and joy from woe,
Like bubbles rise, to orb and burst
In cursings blest and blessings curst.

Lapsing, unlapsing, like a stream,
The old for aye rings in the new;
Man is a dream and life a dream;
Yet the unattainable is true;
And the one triumph not quite vain,
The soul's stern striving to attain.

SLAVERY

THE ships pass up and down the sea,
  The cars along the land;
But where is the world's felicity,
  Or the people that understand?

Folk are trudging along the roads;
  Cannot you hear their tread?
They are stung with whips and stabbed with goads
  And driven until they are dead.

Around the world the poets sing,
  Embroidering fair design;
But how can songs of broidery bring
  Life to the undivine?

They sing the fierceness of the sea,
  The fairness of the land;
But where is the world's felicity,
  Or the people that understand?

PSYCHOLOGY

An Irish saint (so runs the tale)
  Came to a river's bank and spied
No means, by ferry, bridge, or sail,
  Of crossing to the other side.

But, being a Saint and Irish too,
  Not yet a feather would he moult,
And soon a notion what to do
  Flashed on him, like a thunder-bolt:

Himself in his own arms he clipped,
  Himself in his own arms he bore,
Then gaily to the water tripped
  And waded to the farther shore!

This is the very feat the Mind
  Would fain accomplish; to embrace
And comprehend itself, and find
  Beyond itself a resting-place.

SON OF MAN

HUMANITY is God expressed
  In terms of Mind; though not in this
Period nor that; but manifest
  In endless metamorphosis.

In terms of Mind, that apprehends
  Nothing unrelative: that knows
Beginnings only by their ends,
  And from beginning learns the close;

Only by voidness feeling form,
  Only by darkness seeing flame,
Only by silence hearing storm,
  And measuring majesty by shame.

Theirs is the vision, who can see
Mind, like the hovering, heavenly Dove,
Brooding o'er deeps of anarchy
And orbing laws of Life and Love.

ANGLING DAYS

I CARE not where my steps are bent
  Nor what far lands I spy,
The happiest days that e'er I spent
  Or shall spend till I die,
Were those when I a-fishing went
  By Derwent and by Wye;

Or when I hastened to assail
  With sympathetic rod
The darkling Dove, along whose Dale
  Oft Izaac Walton trod;
And if but once I might prevail,
  That hour I was a god!

Who glad as I, when morn arose
And I could sally out
To where the shadowed ripple flows
Beloved of timid trout?
No kinship had I then with those
Who have of day a doubt!

Then, as across the dewy mead
I hurried to the stream,
The lark on his delirious reed
Piped to the morning beam;
And straight I felt an unknown need
And straight began to dream.

The perfect permeance of delight
From that ecstatic strain,
The close communion with the flight
That fears no fall to pain,

Those kisses of the infinite
I shall not know again!

Ah me, the vision that I had!
The long day's playmate look!
It was too magical and mad
To set down in a book;
Though I was but a little lad,
With rod and line and hook.

And still in fancy I can see,
Where Derwent's flood is shed,
The laughing stream pretend to flee,
That yet is never fled,
And beckon with fantastic glee
Where I would fain be led.

How often down the shingly banks,
By mallow overgrown,

And herb-of-willow's purple ranks,
I followed him, alone,
And watched his waves' impatient pranks,
Opposed by stump or stone.

Then every pool a promise held;
Each rock or fallen tree,
Each tress of weed that swayed and swelled
In limpid fluency,
Harboured a mighty trout of eld
That might befall to me.

I loved them well, the spotty trout,
The silver grayling too,
But in those days I had no doubt
And half believed they knew
That skilfully to lure them out
Was what a boy must do.

The insects that they love to snatch,
I studied them each one;
With silk and feathers I could match
The palmer or the dun,
And all the spinning-flies that hatch
And perish in a sun;

But yet, dear stream, no fish that glide
Above your pebbly bed
Your beauty from my heart could hide,
So sumptuously spread
Where'er you laved the meadow side
That I no more may tread.

Your waters, wheresoe'er they run
Are ministers of grace,—
Brown dapplements of shade and sun,
Green isles in grey embrace,

Rare plants, and warbling birds that shun
The more frequented place,—

These, and a thousand more than these,
Your cool declensions bring,
With lapse of delicate degrees
Whose pale illusioning
The painter cannot rightly seize
Nor poet rightly sing.

And you, deep-coiling Wye, where sail
Long weeds with starry flowers,
I followed oft through Darley Dale
Or past old Haddon's towers;
And still I love to tell the tale
Of those uncareful hours.

Nor yet, dear Dove, will I refrain
From greeting you once more;

To rove with you my feet are fain;
From meadow, wood, and tor
I hear you calling, as the main
Calls mariners from shore:

O river, sinuously bright
In youth's far-distant vale,
I see you from a lonely height,
Where soon my feet must fail,
And ever, as I climb, the night
Descends, and you grow pale.

A PONY'S GRAVE

A HAPPY life was yours, my patient Bruce,
To duty faithful, knowing not 'twas due!
For since your heart from every chain was loose,
Save of the corn-bin, grief you never knew.

None taught you love of glory or of gain,
None at a wayward step indignant cried;
You gambolled in blithe colthood, shook your mane,
Did sturdy work, enjoyed your corn, and died!

And now, old bachelor, my mother's pet,
I know your resting-place; a mound of soil
Is heaped above you, which the dew-drops wet
With the sole tears that mourn your life of toil.

The grass you loved is waving o'er your head;
Beyond the crowded churchyard, all alone
You have your space of earth, more merited
Than many a cell where stands a blazoned stone.

It must be sweet to sleep so quietly;
Even the soft-touched rein no more shall grieve;
No more the gentle trouble of a sigh
For the warm stable now your flanks may heave.

For now in chilly stall you lowly lie;
The feet of prattling children near you pass
Schoolward; the poising swallows o'er you fly;
And church-bells sound across the meadow-grass.

THE CATERPILLAR

Caterpillar on the wall,
Whither, whither do you crawl?
You know not, yourself, methinks,
Strange and wandering little sphinx!

I will tell you where to go,—
Underneath the winter snow,
In an old tree's secret bole
You shall hide your little soul.

There, with summer, you shall sleep,
Thence, with summer, you shall leap,
Wave your fairy wings on high,
Sip the flowers and kiss the sky.

Emblem worm of many a thing,—
So the poet's mind can spring
Through the hush of hooding hours,
Kiss the sky and sip the flowers.

TWILIGHT IN LONDON

I HAVE heard the ocean's cadence
Along the Northern shore,
I have heard the wind's upbraidence
Of mere and mountain hoar:
I have heard the throstle fluting
Over his hawthorn nest,
And the nightingale disputing
With the sorrow in his breast:
But oft have I found more sweet
The thunder and beat
Of a London street;
The thunder and beat,
Where the cross-roads meet,
When the lamps are lit in a London street.

I have heard the thunder dealing
The piled peaks blow on blow,
And the distant ranges, reeling,
Resound from snow to snow;
I have heard the ring-dove cooing
Beneath the leafy noon,
And the river softly wooing
The shadows of the moon:
Yet oft have I found more sweet
The thunder and beat
Of a London street,
The thunder and beat
Where the cross-roads meet,
When the lamps are lit in a London street.

DREAM DAYS

O DAYS derived from some diviner Time!
O roses gathered from some happier Land!
O indescribable by earthly rhyme,
The hours we journeyed slowly, hand in hand,
And listened for and heard Love's clear command!

AN EPITAPH

WHEN I, poor fool, am coffined and can lie
Concealed at last from every foolish eye,
Then write no foolish epitaph on me,—
Unless to this most foolish you agree:

"Born to a great position and great name,
This fool has sacrificed them both for shame,—
The shame of Love; the shame of Art; and most,
The shame of Truth; which still he seeks, poor ghost!"

SPANISH FOLK RHYMES

(*Cancionero Popular*)

First Series

I.

The end of Love is where content begins,
And there too end our suffering and our sins.

II.

Love hides upon a mountain of vast height;
Who wins the summit at a grievous cost,
Let him beware he fall in no worse plight;
A single foolish step and he is lost.

III.

To-day I saw her, and she deigned to smile,
Therewith the sunshine sent a heavenly ray

Into my inmost soul, to reconcile
My earthly footsteps to the heavenly way:
And therefore I believe in God to-day.

IV.

Methinks that at your birth
A little piece of heaven fell down to earth;
Nor yet that sacred morsel to the sky
Shall be restored until the day you die.

V.

Whichever way I turn,
Death still opposes:
Far off, you slay me with the thorn;
Beside you, with the roses.

VI.

This memory will remain to me,
When I shall have no other:
The first kiss that I gave to thee
And the last I gave my mother.

VII.

I am tormented both by joy and sorrow;
But yesterday I hungered for the morrow,
The hour that brought me you, now passed away,
And now I pine again for yesterday.

VIII.

Will you compare the fountain with the pool,
The stagnant pool that in a day is dry?
My love for you is like a fountain, full
Of pure perpetual felicity.

IX.

If I were dug from underneath the ground,
A thousand years from hence, what would be found?
Thy name upon my bones, when all is turned
To dust but they, indelibly inburned.

X.

But yesterday I saw the bier
On which they bore my dearest dear:
All but one hand was hid from view;
By that I knew.

XI.

The plaint of nightingales that mourn their dears,
The plash of fountains and their falling flood,
These may be emblems of another's tears;
But mine for my lost love are burning blood.

XII.

Once they were sweet, the waters of the sea;
What turned them bitter, my lost love? Ah me,
What but the bitter tears I shed for thee?

XIII.

When you refused, I plunged to woe;
But now the turn is mine:
Now I refuse, and you may go
In my black pain to pine.

XIV.

Grief killed me not; I am not sensitive;
I owe it to my dulness that I live.

XV.

A woman first misled me: where's the sin
That in a woman had not origin?

XVI.

Women and horses (so my memories teach)
Have intimate resemblance, each to each:
Both need a master hand, to keep their thought
From crooked ways, to journey as it ought.

XVII.

Most women's virtue is nor more nor less
Than simple selfishness.

XVIII.

Friends comfort our lives; love beautifies;
Though love may perish, friendship never dies.

XIX.

The quality of friendship is not hidden,
It rushes to the wound, like blood, unbidden.

XX.

Walls of hard stone, and prison bars of brass,—
Therein I live, and all my friends are glass;
They dare not venture hither for my sake,
In terror lest their brittleness should break.

XXI.

The very timber suffers strange constraint
Of Fate, or kind or cruel:
This portion for the image of a saint,
And that for fuel.

XXII.

Your evil mother holds you in her power,
Though she be dead;
From rotten wheat is made bad flour,
From rotten flour, bad bread.

XXIII.

Who in this horrid world desires to see
No more betrayal or stupidity,
Must forthwith to his inner chamber pass,
Bar up the door, and break the looking-glass.

XXIV.

I saw a tree whose glory was the toy
Of winter winds; so is it with our joy;
Age mocks our passions and our heart bereaves,
And fond illusions fall from us, like leaves.

XXV.

I cry to Conscience, "Let me die at peace";
I hear a voice, "With Death shall Conscience cease."

XXVI.

Where would'st thou lead me, Thought? Beware
Lest stairs that never end
Lead to some dizzy stair
Whence none descend.

XXVII.

What can the Book of Life to mortals teach,
Since the last sentence none can ever reach?

XXVIII.

Come to me, Death, with crashes and loud cries,
With unforeseen confusion and strong strife;

Lest, if you come with restful reveries,
The joy of dying lead me back to life.

XXIX.

'Twould surely kill me, so my heart to rend
As tell my sorrow to my dearest friend;
But when at last I lie on Earth's brown breast,
I'll whisper it to her and be at rest.

XXX.

"In vain your utmost skill; howe'er you try,
You never can explain so well as I":
So, to the Speech, the Sigh.

SPANISH FOLK RHYMES

Second Series

I.

No power on earth could break the thread,
Though but one hair should bind me to your bed,
A single hair from your belovéd head.

II.

To see you every day of every moon,
To kiss you every day of every seven,
To hold you in my arms from noon to noon
Would be my heaven.

III.

Why didst thou light the fire that burns my breast,
While thou thyself art scatheless and at rest?

IV.

She wrote her vow in dust one summer day;
The wind at sunset blew the dust away.

V.

I travelled o'er the world to seek your pleasure,
But got no treasure;
Still have I failed,
Finding all doors fast nailed.

VI.

The love by illusion, the love by caprice,
And the love that you buy, as you buy a valise.

VII.

Your heart is like an Inn, where passers by
Find easy lodging; wherefore, then, should I
Devote to you a heart without a lie?

VIII.

Your hopes are satisfied:
With plenteous gems your body you can deck;
All eyes are gratified!
The value of your virtue clothes your neck.

IX.

I wish to be as close in women's thrall
As pictures that are plaistered to the wall:
But from the mother of my wife as far
As the remotest star.

X.

Lady, your heart is like a drum;
Struck from without, 'tis never dumb:
But yet that loud-resounding din
Has nought but emptiness within.

XI.

Who lights two candles in his room is wise;
And so is she who takes a second swain:
One flame may live, although another dies,
And though one lover vanish, one remain.

XII.

You may be a most fortunate person in health;
You may be a most prosperous person in wealth;
You may be in your trade or profession most clever;
These and more you may be; but a gentleman never.

XIII.

Why come you hither weeping? Best alone
The sorrow of my prison I endure:
For when I see you weeping, hear you moan,
Your anguish makes my anguish doubly sure.

AN EPIGRAM

I CAN'T believe
That God was not too clever
To think that Adam might have lived for ever:
That was arranged when God created Eve.

THE PRISONER'S PLEA

Quia multum dilectus sum

SOMETHING touched me from the sky,
Wingéd like a butterfly,
Something from a far land flown,
Touched me to this tender tone:

When before the throne I stand,
With my sins in either hand,
Saying "This is all I bring
Of those talents, O my King,
That thou gavedst me whilome,
On that Earth, my mournful home,"
Then, if I have time to cry
Ere my doom he ratify,
Full before his face I'll say,

"One thing only can outweigh
All this burden that I bear,—
Barren gifts and compound care:
Forasmuch as I have won
Such a sparkle of the sun
As in chrysolite is trapped,—
Far more preciously enwrapped
In thy own created gauze
Where thy own Son once did pause,—
Forasmuch as I can prove
That I gained a woman's love,
One in whom a flame of thine
Flickered through the crystalline
Tablature, on which thy pen
Graved those messages to men
Which compelled their eyes to see
Hints of immortality,

I can claim that my poor gold
Has increased a thousand-fold.
Call her hither; let her stand
Here beside me; then command—
Nay, there is no need to bid
Lips not lie that never did;
Let her eyes but rest on mine
And thou need'st not be divine
To interpret what they shout."

So far; then my song was out;
Up to heaven the bright wings bent;
I below, in wonderment,
Watched them fade, as fades the lark,
Drawn to heaven,—a sacred spark,
Vanishing in native light,
Whence it issued into sight.

"IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH"

When you in sickness lie,
No more the field is green, nor blue the sky;
No more invisible and lovely things
The forest haunt with songs and rustling wings;
Back from my stricken sense the world recedes,
And beauty's garden is a patch of weeds.

Then can I catch in music's blithest tone
Nought but the closing cadence of a moan;
Then can I joy no more in sound unheard
Save in the silence of the written word;
The melodies that once could charm my ear
Forebode some final dissonance of fear.

Earth has no health, when health from you is fled;
No angel stands between the quick and dead;
The awful unity of life and death
Is sacramental in your labouring breath;
And as I watch you I can hear Him call
Who is the King of Nothing or of All.

But ah! your nature surely cannot owe
To that grim tyrant such an overthrow;
You seem a creature of an alien strain
From force and fate, and unallied to pain;
Could you but meet their Master, little while
Would lapse ere you had won him to a smile.

"TILL DEATH US DO PART"

Oft in the lapses of the night,
When dead things live and live things die,
I touch you, with a wild affright
Lest you have ceased in sleep to sigh.

There is no truth I fear to face,
Not e'en the record of my heart
That brands me recreant from grace,
Except the truth that we must part.

Before the phantom of that hour,
Time's Officer to you and me,
A miserable wretch I cower
And plead for pity, hopelessly.

"May we not tread the path," I cry,
"Together? None the way can miss;
It ends against the sunset sky,—
A turning or a precipice."

OASIS

THINK not that I, in morbid mood,
Extravagantly speak;
You are the only daily good
That not in vain I seek.

As those who o'er a desert pace,
From dawn till daylight dies,
At noon arriving at a place
Where precious water lies,

Drink deep,—so I the fountain cool
Of your clear spirit quaff,
And ever find the charméd pool
Is bubbling with a laugh.

Then o'er the arid plains of thought,
Refreshed, I plod again,
World-careless, by the world unsought,
Singing my palmer strain.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

When o'er the land rebellion rolls—
  The land of love that owns our sway—
When tumult canopies our souls,
  Like vapour that conceals the day,
    My strength is this,—to you and me
    Will come a Year of Jubilee.

Then shall our thoughts be freed from sin
  And all our felon fancies shriven,
The harvest shall be gathered in,
  The folk be fed, the foe forgiven,
    When full of grace to you and me
    Returns our Year of Jubilee.

For so to each true-wedded sprite
A fairer pleasure comes of pain,
When mutual love renews delight,
Transforming harm to health again:
Such hope is ours,—for you and me
Comes back a Year of Jubilee.

And therefore let us scorn the lore
Of rogues who would revile the power
Of love, that makes us more and more
The heirs of things beyond the hour,
Where still is stored for you and me
Another Year of Jubilee.

PARADISE REGAINED

THERE is a garden somewhere set,
Where singing birds abound,
And plashing founts the marble fret
With soft persistent sound;

Sorrow and sighing thence shall flee,
And none shall there intrude,
Save those who by simplicity
Have won beatitude;

The simple heart and simple mind,
Sincere in trust and troth,
From honest pleasure unconfined,
For honest love unloth;

And there shall you be Queen; but I,
Shall I find entrance too?
Or must I roam eternity,
To search, sweetheart, for you?

AMOR, SUMMA INJURIA

Forgive me for the wrong I did,
To make you love me. Well I know
In that injurious hour were hid
Long hours of woe.

If judgment be pronounced on sin
Hereafter, then shall I be lost,
Because your love I dared to win
At such a cost;

At such a cost to you; ah me,
How often have your eyes o'erbrimmed,
By alien infelicity
Unjustly dimmed,

When from my heart, without a sign,
Some random lightning of unrest,
Some folly or misword of mine,
Has pierced your breast.

Forgive me, dear. If you forgive,
Methinks I shall not wholly die;
For Love will surely let me live,
If you comply.

A LITTLE SEQUENCE

I.

No wonder you so oft have wept;
For I was born unblest:
Yet wounded creature never crept
To you but found a rest;

To you the patient hound's mild eyes
Are turned in perfect trust,
And into yours, with sure surmise,
The baby's hand is thrust;

The little birds make you their friend,
The flowers in your sweet hand

Arrange themselves, and graceful bend,
As if they understand.

And when these die,—the household pet,—
The babe (though not your own),—
Yes, or the very flowers,—you fret
To fly where they have flown.

II.

I can never be your hero again,
As I was when first we met;
I know I have caused you too much pain,
And the wounds are smarting yet.

I know that the sun is not of gold
Nor the moon of silvery sheen

So bright as they were in the days of old,
When we were their King and Queen;

Then heaven was ours, and the earth and the sea,—
Eternity, Time, and Fate;
There was nothing wanting to you or me,
When we entered on Love's estate.

Only the world and the ways of men
We resigned for the Lover's Land;
And God poured into our deep hearts then
Joy, with his own right hand.

III.

Forgive!
And tell me that sweet tale,

How you and I one day may live
In some diviner vale.

In some diviner vale, dear child,
Than this in which we lie
And watch the monstrous mountains piled
And clouded into sky.

Yet even there, far out of reach
Are peaks we cannot scale,
For God has something still to teach
In that diviner vale.

IV.

Of all the tears that men are born to shed
More than my share has fallen to my lot;

And often have I wished that I were dead,
Because I fancied that you loved me not.

But though that fear for ever passed away,
Because you laid your life down at my feet,
Still must I weep; for how can he be gay,
Who ever fancied that you loved not, Sweet?

Yet now my tears flow backward; and behold,
From where we stand upon Time's latest hill,
Full sunshine lies before us; let me fold
Your hand in mine and bravely journey still.

"ALONE AND PALELY LOITERING"

WHAT comfort can you teach them,
  Who have followed Love so far
That never a foot can reach them,
  Nor ever a hand unbar

The gates of darkness and distance
  They traversed, one joy to gain,
In their madness of persistence
  And their disregard of pain?

You cannot hear their wailing,
  They are out of human ken;
And pity is unavailing;
  They are deaf as murdered men;

Their ears are stopped with straining
For Love's remembered song;
They are dumb with fierce complaining
And blind with tears of wrong.

Not damned, nor yet forgiven,
But bound beneath a spell,
They are not cheered by heaven,
They are not helped by hell;

Poised in the sullen places
Where the force of life is sped,
Aloof from living faces,
Unfellowed by the dead.

THE BURIAL OF LOVE

How shall we bury the old love?
With bitter tears and deep sighing;
For oh! 'tis scarcely a cold love,
And long and hard was its dying.

'Twas born in the time of roses,
Itself the fairest of flowers,
And Winter, plucking his posies,
Still spared that blossom of ours.

Deep in the earth it was rooted,
But still it looked to the sky,
It budded, blossomed, and fruited,
And then it had to die.

We follow with reverence and slowly
The seraph who deigns to bear it,
And has promised in ground more holy
Than any of Earth's to inter it;

But ah! to bury the old love,
It stings the heart with sighing;
For all other love is cold love,
And all the dreams are dying.

"THERE SHALL BE WEEPING"

THERE is a river, ordained to roam
  Where never the slow kine feed,
Where never the warbler builds her home,
  By vale, or forest, or mead.

Barren and sullen and black it creeps,
  Bearing nor boat nor barge;
Nothing is fashioned within its deeps,
  Nothing along its marge.

Never the city it leaps to lave,
  Never o'erbrims its side
To moisten the meadow; across its wave
  Never the swallows glide.

Flowerless glimmers its pallid edge,
Treeless shimmers its sheen;
Nowhere its shallows are set with sedge,
Nowhere with rushes green.

Salt from its birth in the marsh of wrong,
Bitter with tribute rills,
Its home is not in the sea, its song
Is not of the pure, blue hills.

Shrouded in mist, it makes its moan
Of the burden of mortal years,
Like the cry of a child, in the night, alone;
And men have called it Tears.

COLOPHON

While invention holds the session,
  Who so blithe as I?
After, comes the deep depression,
  All is vacancy.

Then the spirits that I mustered
  Shrink to secret cells,
Then the flowers that I clustered
  Cease to weave their spells.

No more God converses;
  I am left alone;
Earth, with all her curses,
  Grinds me, like a stone.

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